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THE CENTRAL IOWA EXPERIENCE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Happy holiday season Facets readers! My pumpkin spice, cinnamon, warm vanilla and all other cozy-smelling candles are burning at full flame. The crock-pot is also on full blast with roasts and soups and chili. I recently knitted wild-colored hand warmers. I'd say the fall/winter season is off to a good start.

This time of year I look forward to being surrounded by family and the kindness and love that comes with it. Thanksgiving tends to be the holiday where we ask the younger cousins what they are hoping Santa will bring them and catch up on the latest family tales — and maybe tell some old favorites.

We also tend to look ahead into the new year around this time of year. I would venture to say most people think about making a resolution for the new year. The plan is to keep the resolution. I rarely succeed. Maybe it is because I don't make realistic resolutions. Or maybe it is that I don't make a plan or set a goal and timeframe. When I gave our writers the topic of new year's resolutions, I received a few questions back about usually waiting until January for that topic. I found those questions very understandable. I didn't commit to my 2015 resolution until after the clock struck midnight on January 1. Of course I had given it some thought, but I hadn't made a plan. How many people make a resolution and then fall off the band

wagon a couple months later because they don't make themselves accountable ahead of time?

The reason I chose the new year's resolution for our December topic is to get us started on the commitment. If you seriously want to commit to your resolution, in my opinion, it is best to take time to think about what it is you want to resolve. Do you want to save more money, lose weight, change your lifestyle, better yourself, eat less chocolate? So many popular resolutions are difficult to keep.

My resolution for 2015 was as follows:

All I have to say about 2015 is: Bring it on! Challenge me like never before world, I will hand back anything you throw at me and I WILL grow as a DESIGNER, ARTIST, HUMAN.

It has been difficult, to say the least. Have I succeeded? Yes. Some of the success may be smaller than I would like, but it is a success. How did I succeed? I designed a plan that fits me. No resolution goal is going to be one-size-fits-all.

I am not a counselor or any type of professional aide that could help make a resolution and design plan to keep it. All I can say is to give yourself small goals — battles to win the war. Trust yourself, love yourself and don't be so hard on yourself if you falter. Success isn't easy. It takes time, patience and deep breathes.

To all Facets readers: you got this!

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The next oldest profession

BY KAREN SCHWALLER
Contributing Writer

I've often said the difference between my older sister and me is that you could eat off of her floor and not even think twice about it; but you could eat off of my floor and get full.

For all these years I could have blamed it on the fact that I had more children to clean up after than she did, or I could attribute the difference to the fact that I live on the farm.

There are so many ways a farm house can get dirty. People naturally dirty up a house, but sooner or later everything about living on the open prairie can wreak havoc and cast a dark shadow on your housekeeping skills.

My sister — an immaculate housekeeper — used to secretly leave me notes in the dusty furniture and wait to see how long it took me to find them. For her it wasn't a matter of whether or not she would find the dust; it was simply a matter of where to write the note. It took me two weeks to find one of her notes — it was on the headboard of the bed. I must not have spent much time up there during daylight hours — snoozing or dusting ... or anything else, apparently. Good thing she didn't leave a secret call for help.

My housekeeping skills were targeted one day when our (then) elementary-school-aged daughter asked me what that yellow can was in the cupboard, as she pointed to the furniture polish. Apparently she had never seen me use it. Oh, how ashamed my mother would be.

I made up for my lack of dusting skills by using my time to hang our laundry out in that great-smelling country air. That is, when it wasn't manure hauling day.

I think my nose hairs have grown back in — those were some beak-breaker days.

Now we live in a different home and live on the north side of a gravel road. That means when people drive past the place, the prevailing southwest winds blow the road dirt right into the yard. If conditions mimic the Sahara and a Siberian-like wind is blowing, it looks like the Dust Bowl days here at home. Amana's Living History Farms has nothing on us.

It also means our house is not only filthy on the inside, but on the outside now, too.

An urban friend of mine told me this past fall she was delighted to open all of her windows to let the fresh, cool breeze in. I was a little jealous. For us, corn chopping and fall harvest mark the end of open-window season. If we opened

the windows during that time we could be buried alive right in our own home.

And as for drying the clothes these days, they don't see a clothesline any more than my husband sees the dentist. The gas company must love our prevailing winds and dusty gravel roads. At our previous home it was birds with bowel issues that gave me the most angst about hanging clothes out to dry. I guess manure of all kinds will find its way onto farm clothing.

Farm women have a lot of resolve — whether they grew up on a farm or married into that life. Every year they can resolve to stay on top of the house cleaning by doing a little bit every day, but it lasts until her husband needs her help outside. Often, by the time she comes back in she's an accomplice to the dirty crime that is already well underway.

But the thing is, having a spotless house isn't necessarily at the top of her list either, because by helping on the farm, she's contributing not only to the family business, but to something greater — she's helping to ensure that the farm will continue on. So she resolves all year that she'll clean the house when she has the time.

After all, it's the world's next oldest profession ... and boy is it a dirty one.

The gifts to this friend are the stories of a lifetime

BY SHARON RANDALL
Tribune News Service

Do you have a friend you've known and loved for more years than either of you care to count?

I hope so. Say her name, picture her face, recall the sound of her laughter, the color of her eyes, the way she makes you feel. When was the last time you spent an hour together? How would you describe the kind of person she is? What sort of difference has she made in your life and those of others? How do you want to remember her?

If you could tell just one story about your friendship, from all the countless memories you've shared over the years, which one would you choose?

The invitation, like the guest of honor (and her lovely daughter who sent it), was beautiful and elegantly understated:

"Join us to celebrate Ginny's 70th birthday." Then came the date, place, time and a note: "No gifts, but bring a story about your friendship to share."

My mind raced with questions. The party was in California. There was no way I wanted to miss it. I live in Nevada, but that weekend, I was supposed to be in Arizona. Could I change my plans? Rearrange the flights? Where would I stay? What would I wear? And how in the world did my friend

Ginny get to be 70 years old?

Here's a little tip: Do what you want while you're young. Pretty soon you'll be trying to figure out how to get to your friend's 70th birthday party.

All of those questions (except the one about Ginny's age) were easy. The hard one was which story to tell at her party.

For example. I could tell how we met at my wedding on the steps of the church. We were both running late. I spotted her and her husband and knew they were the college buddies I'd heard so much about from the man I was marrying. They were anxious to get a seat. I told them not to worry, the service wasn't likely to start without me. It was the first of a great lifetime of laughs that we would share.

I could tell how I told my husband, if he and I ever split, I wanted custody of Ginny and her husband. I could describe how we raised our children together, their two, our three, going camping in the rain, sharing cabins in the snow, saving our parental sanities just by knowing we weren't alone.

I could confess how I once left my house in a godawful mess to drive up to see them. On the way up, our car broke down. They came to our rescue, drove us back to our place and spent a weekend in the godawful mess.

I could recall how when my husband was dying with cancer, they came to say goodbye.

We spent a few hours talking and laughing, remembering good times we'd shared. When they left, he grinned and told me I could have custody of them until the day he'd see them again.

I could tell lots of stories about my friend and our friendship. But this one, I think, says it all.

Years ago, I interviewed Linus Pauling. He was 93 years old, had won two Nobel Prizes, was still doing research and seemed glad to tell me a great many things, including this. His wife, Ada, had died the previous year. He missed her, it seemed, something fierce.

"Tell me about her," I said.

He lit up. "We met in college," he said. "Her IQ was higher than mine. She could've done all the research I have done. Instead, she chose to make a home and a life for me and our children. She made everything possible."

Two things struck me about that statement. One, Ada Pauling lived a life of her own choosing. Two, beyond other achievements, she chose, for her husband and children, to make "everything possible."

I'd say the same of my friend Ginny. The life she has chosen, the home she has made, all the things she makes possible?

I wish you could see her.

That's my story about my friend. What's yours?





NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS FOR AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

KECIA PLACE-FENCL
Contributing Writer

Many people start the new year with “New Year’s Resolutions,” but according to the Huffington Post, only 8 percent of people who make resolutions actually stick with them. This year when setting your New Year’s Resolution, follow these simple steps to be a part of the 8 percent who keep their resolutions.

CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

Instead of viewing fitness as an all-or-nothing, look at it as a continuum. Evaluate every decision you make and decide whether it is getting you closer to one end of the continuum (an active lifestyle) or the other (an inactive lifestyle). Choosing to sit on the couch and watch my favorite television show would move me in the wrong direction, while lifting weights and doing some cardio during the show and/or commercials

would move me in the right direction. By making small, positive decisions, you can move closer to a more active lifestyle.

MAKE THEM S.M.A.R.T. (SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ATTAINABLE, REALISTIC, AND TIMELY)

■ **Specific** — Write precise goals stated in terms of performance. This should be the what, why and how of your smart goals.

■ **Measurable** — You should be able to measure your progress and success.

■ **Attainable** — Your goals should stretch you enough that you feel challenged, but they should be well thought out so that they are achievable. You should plan your actions wisely and establish a timeframe that allows you to carry out those actions. If you set a goal that is

impossible, you will lack motivation to try to accomplish it. Attainable goals encourage motivation.

■ **Relevant** — Set goals that are important to YOU! Just because a friend or family member has a similar goal should not be a reason for you to have the same goal.

■ **Timely** — Your goals should be linked to a timeframe so that you can evaluate your progress and success.

HAVE A SOLID RATIONALE

When your rationale is so solid that it outweighs your excuses, you will find the desire and motivation to work hard to achieve your goals. Have a valid reason for why you have the goal(s) that you do and share your goals with others. When you put yourself out there, others will help encourage and motivate you to achieve your goals.

out for 14 days, which Franke and her team tested in a hot and humid climatology lab using silica gel beads that change from blue to pink when exposed to moisture. (For the record, even inexpensive disposable plastic containers performed respectably for about a week.)

Franke says containers with silicone gaskets and lids that snap on all four sides are especially effective at keeping food fresh.

There have been other user-friendly developments in food storage. Many manufacturers no longer make plastics with bisphenol-A (BPA), the controversial chemical that has been linked to possible health risks, even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration considers it safe. And in light of the ongoing conversation about food waste, companies are exploring new ways to help consumers hold onto their produce longer. Oxo's Green-Saver products, for example, feature activated carbon filters, "floating" baskets and adjustable vents that are designed to, respectively, trap ethylene gas (which causes some produce to decay), promote airflow and control humidity.

Kimbriel says container materials also have expanded beyond glass and plastic to include stainless steel and silicone. The Container Store sells a line of silicone containers that are microwave- and oven-safe.

Some silicone containers collapse for easy storage. Another organizing solution: sets with nesting containers and lids, such as Joseph Joseph's Nest Food Storage collection. Other brands feature lids that snap onto the bottom of containers, such as Snapware Airtight, which Cook's Illustrated highly recommended in its rigorous testing of plastic food storage containers in 2010. No more mismatched sets or

cascades of tumbling plastic.

The shape of the container is another factor to consider. Most people gravitate toward rectangular pieces, Kimbriel says, as they're easier to store and optimize available space. The depth of the containers is important as well. Cook's Illustrated noted that low, flat versions make it easy to stack items above or below them. The magazine added that shallower containers also facilitate quick cooling, to get food out of the temperature danger zone where bacteria can thrive (40 to 140 degrees), as well as heating, which means dinner can get on the table that much faster.

Whatever you end up buying, follow the manufacturer's care instructions. Most plastics belong on the top rack of your dishwasher, if you put them there at all. "I'm an advocate of hand-washing things," Kimbriel says.

Sometimes you might not need to bother with a container. Franke says food companies have worked on packaging that keeps their food fresher. A good clip might be all you need to close a bag of coffee or chips, she says.

GLASS AND PLASTIC CONTAINERS: WHAT TO USE WHEN

- Oven-safe - Glass
- Kid-friendly - Plastic
- Lightweight - Plastic
- Goes from freezer to microwave - Both
- Lids have gaskets and clamps - Both
- Keeps food fresh - Both
- BPA-free - Both (Plastic, some)
- Dishwasher-safe - Both (Plastic, generally top rack)
- Stain-resistant - Both (Plastic, varies)
- Odor-resistant - Both (Plastic, varies)

Whatever
you end
up buying,
follow the
manufac-
turer's care
instructions.
Most plas-
tics belong
on the top
rack of
your dish-
washer,
if you put
them there
at all.



There's an airtight case for glass and plastic storage

BY BECKY KRYSTAL
Washington Post

Until we all started taking our own reusable bags to the grocery store, there was the inevitable question at the checkout lane: paper or plastic?

Now there's still at least one material question to consider once we get that food home and start cooking, eating and storing it: glass or plastic?

If you're like me, at least one of your kitchen cabinets is overflowing with an assortment of containers intended for storing leftovers. A lot of them have come via takeout food or goodies my mom has sent home with me. Occasionally I'm tempted to cull the herd and pick up a few new workhorses that aren't stained, cloudy or missing lids.

But where to start?

Because the number of options can be overwhelming, employees at the Container Store are trained to ask customers a series of questions, says Kim Kimbriel, a buyer for the national chain.

Think about who's going to be using the containers and what they'll be using them for, Kimbriel says. Kids taking lunch to school? Plastic. Mom storing food in the freezer for oven-ready meals? Glass.

"There's a trend that we see that people are really loving glass as an option," she says.

"Generally, glass is the most airtight," says Sharon Franke, kitchen appliances and technology director for the Good Housekeeping Institute in New York.

Good Housekeeping recently published its "best of the best" on food storage, with Frieling's Emsa Clip & Close containers coming out on top. They kept air

BREAK THEM UP INTO SMALLER COMPONENTS

When we look at the big picture, it can sometimes be overwhelming. Take some time to evaluate how you can break up your goal(s) into smaller chunks that are easier to manage. This will make the goal seem more achievable. If you set a goal to do 150 push-ups in a month, break it up into smaller chunks; try doing 10 push-ups every other day. This will make conquering the goal more achievable.

HAVE FUN

Think outside of the box. Make fitness a game. Jump on trampolines at the Sky Zone in Grimes. Go to a group fitness class that you've always wanted to try at your gym. Rent a kayak, canoe, or stand-up paddle board from Jax Outdoors in Ames for your next water excursion. Invite a friend to join you on your active adventure. Climb the rock wall at Climb

Iowa in Grimes. Try something new and exciting. Rent snowshoes or cross country skis from Skunk River Cycles in Ames to enjoy winters in Iowa. Play a game of tag or kickball with the kids. Be creative and turn that boring workout into something fun!

SCHEDULE TIME FOR YOU

When you have an appointment that you can't miss, you make sure to schedule other things around it. You are important, so put yourself first. Take pride and ownership in getting stronger. View your fitness time as an appointment that you have to schedule other things around; this will help ensure that you get the coveted time that you deserve.

BE FORGIVING

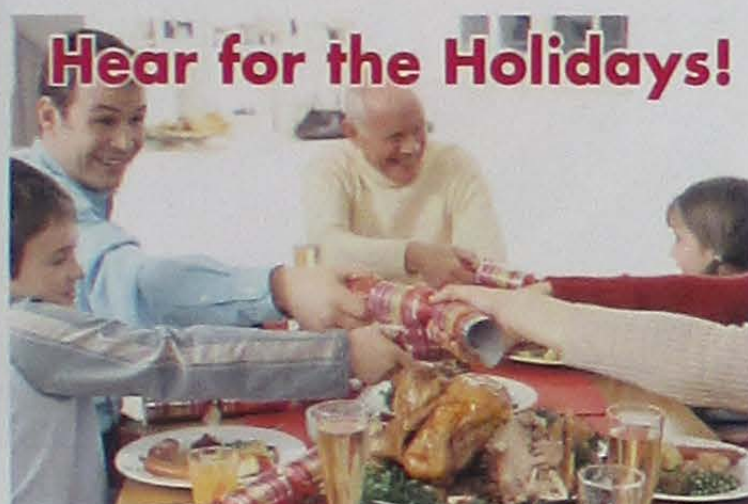
Life throws us curve balls that we have to work around all of the time. Be forgiving when you are sick, if a family emergency arises or you get derailed for one

reason or another. Just make sure this derailment is temporary and doesn't become a permanent habit.

EVALUATE YOUR PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

Take time to reflect on things that are working well and things that need to change to help with your success. Reflecting throughout your journey will help keep you focused. As John Dewey said, "We do not learn from our experiences ... we learn from reflecting on experiences."

New Year's resolutions should not be something to stress over, but rather guide you to achieve your goals. Similarly, being active should not be a chore, but rather a privilege. Following these simple steps should help set you up for success so you can be a part of the 8 percent who stick with their resolutions and develop the active lifestyle they deserve.



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A Growing List of Resolutions

BY JAN RIGGENBACH
Contributing Writer

The garden season is over. And once again my garden fell short of the perfection I'd pictured in my mind.

With fresh memories of the season's imperfections, I'm making my resolutions for a better garden in 2016.

Top of my list is improving the soil. I vow to add more compost and earthworm castings. And I resolve to add even more organic material by planting cover crops on every square inch of bare ground around my vegetable crops. Also known as green manure, cover crops such as oats and rye can serve as a living mulch, then be turned into the soil before spring planting for a superb soil booster.

Another resolution: Plan and plant more for winter beauty. From the wall of windows inside my great room, I still see too much brown in the winter landscape. The space begs for more evergreens, big and small. And trees with colorful bark, such as paper-bark maple and seven-son flower tree. I'll also consider shrubs that have colorful bark, such as red-stem dogwood and green-stem Japanese kerria. Any trees or shrubs with colorful and persistent fruits, including many varieties of crabapples, could also brighten my winter view.

I'll also plant more perennials that maintain an attractive

presence all winter, such as Christmas fern and hen and chicks. More ground covers that remain attractive in winter, like Angelina sedum and Japanese spurge. And more ornamental grasses that remain upright all winter, such as feather reed grass and switch grass.

For even more ideas of plants that shine in the winter landscape, I will strive to walk often in public gardens during the winter.

Because walnut roots invaded one of the raised beds where I grow tomatoes, I must take steps to protect the 2016 tomato crop from walnut wilt. I will grow some tomato plants in 20-gallon fabric grow-bags. And, after a diminished tomato harvest this year, I vow to put in a few extra tomato plants, just in case 2016 is not a banner year for tomatoes.

As always, my list of resolutions includes a list of perennials that I need to divide in spring: asters, tall sedums, garden phlox, bee balm, and daylilies, to name a few.

It also includes a list of new things I want to try: Sprout a ginger root in April. Plant a dwarf lotus bowl. See if I can over-winter mandevilla in its dormant state.

Along with my plans of what to do, I also keep a page in my record book of new plants I'm looking for: one page each for trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, grasses, vines, veggies, and herbs. It may take a year or two, but it's worth the hunt.

Those are my garden resolutions so far. What are yours?

Along with my plans of what to do, I also keep a page in my record book of new plants I'm looking for: one page each for trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, grasses, vines, veggies, and herbs. It may take a year or two, but it's worth the hunt.

Red-stem dogwood stands out against a backdrop of evergreens in the winter landscape. Photo by Proven Winners

Wallpaper a clever way to try the marble trend

BY LAURA PEARSON
Chicago Tribune

Marble's presence in modern-day interiors extends from walls to countertops, tables to doorknobs, clocks to sinks and beyond. The ancient metamorphic rock turns up in both large and small doses in variously styled spaces, and despite a centuries-old association with luxury and refinement, lends subtle polish (versus all-out opulence) when mixed with unexpected materials. A contemporary designer might introduce marble into a rustic kitchen, for example, to add some sleekness to wood-grain everything.

A sure sign of marble's metamorphosis? The rise of marble prints. Rather than shell out a lot of money for the real deal, more budget-conscious decorators may opt to install marble wallpaper from Ferm Living.

The Denmark-based design brand sells a realistic marble pattern, in both a classic gray and pretty rose hue, of "WallSmart" wallpaper. Made of nonwoven fleece, it's supposedly easier and faster to hang than woven varieties. The effect is that appealing high/low mix of marble elegance and informality — sophisticated in pattern but also tongue-in-cheek. At \$103.50 a roll (cheaper than grand slabs of marble but still not cheap), Ferm Living's trompe l'oeil wallpaper is best used as an accent rather than, say, a multiroom wall covering. Pair it with Ferm Living's marble-patterned bedding to make an even stronger statement.

Available from Clever Spaces, Ferm Living's official retail partner for the U.S. and Canada. www.cleverspaces.com

Marble wallpaper from Ferm Living, pictured in gray, is printed on WallSmart wallpaper.
Photo courtesy Ferm Living/TNS

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Parents @ Play: Warming up to more time indoors

BY ARMIN BROTT
AND SAMANTHA FEUSS
Tribune News Service

As temperatures drop and family playtime starts moving indoors, you'll find yourself wanting to break out (or acquire) new playthings for your little ones. Here are some adorable options that we're sure will make their way onto your holiday wish lists (yes, we're already thinking about the holidays).

ZOOMER JESTER

AND ZOOMER CHOMPLINGZ

Zoomer Jester is a new species of Zoomer Dino, called the Jokeasaurus, and, as you might guess, he loves to make you laugh. Balanced on two wheels, Zoomer Jester can spin around, chomp and growl. Yes, he can get angry, but he also giggles. He detects movement with his nose and you can control him by using your hands or the remote control. He's eager to please and if you're patient, he'll "learn" tricks. When you're done playing, be sure to charge him up so he'll be ready to go for the next round of fun. Prices vary. Available in stores like Toys R Us and Amazon. Zoomer Chomplingz are mini versions of Zoomer Dinosaurs, but they deliver just as much fun. With mouth- and nose sensors that detect motion, they're quite interactive. They also come with a bone to play catch with. These little guys make all sorts of noises (including gas, which just about guarantees that the kids — and dad — will love them even more). Set your Chomplingz to "guard mode," and they'll protect your room (or your dinner!) and will ferociously growl at those that dare to trespass. Three different Chomplingz are available everywhere, and five are exclusive to a specific store (i.e. Walmart or Toys R Us). Check zoomer-dino.com

CLOUD PETS

When bedtime looms, these cuddly, plush companions from Jay at Play

are good for a lot more than snuggles. Just download the free app from the Apple Store or Google Play, and you (or grandma or grandpa or anyone else) can record a message for your child. You can send the message from anywhere, but not directly to the Cloud Pet — it has to go through a Bluetooth-enabled device that's in the same room. A blinking red light lets your child know that a new message is waiting; they just squeeze the Pet's paw to hear it. Kids can reply to the message in the same way — from their pet to the nearby device, and on to Dad or Mom in Timbuktu. Comes in Puppy, Kitty, Teddy, Bunny, Elephant or Unicorn. cloudpets.com

STRAWBERRY

SHORTCAKE 35TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

For the Strawberry Shortcake lover in your life — or the girl who grew up in the '80s — there's a cute Strawberry Shortcake Classic 35th Anniversary Edition Small Doll, who looks and smells just like she did way back when... This special edition reproduction of the original doll is exclusive to Target for \$10. If you're looking for something cuddlier, consider the Strawberry Shortcake Classic Rag Doll 35th Anniversary Edition. She's great to take along on trips, put in your baby stroller, and tuck into bed with your child at night. At \$20, she's also great for collectors.



Salons and their ever-changing technology

Technology in salons continues to advance. As one who grew up at the front desk of mom's salons as a receptionist I can vouch for all of them.

We had desk-bound telephones. Hand cranked adding machines to tally the client's ticket. And paper spiral-bound appointment books that required flipping pages of 4-, 6-, 8- or 10-column-per-page sheets to go to a future date to make appointments for clients. Dates had to be hand written in as did the names of stylists. And the IRS demanded we store them for seven years.

Today we call clients guests (I am reminded of Beauty and the Beast's song "Be Our Guest"). Appointment books are on computers that allow a click of a key to move ahead or back a day, a week, a month or even a year.

Employees (stylists, estheticians, nail techs, massage therapists, etc.) are entered only once in the staff database and then after the schedule is set self-populate the appointment book "sheets" on the desktop.

Of course that computer has mini-computers in the salon to check on appointments without walking to the front desk and to schedule appointments from a distance.

In addition, guests can now go on the internet from their home or computers or cell phones or tablets to schedule online.

Before an appointment the guest gets a reminder text and/or email instead of the reminder call that often found no one home to answer the phone.

The desk-bound phone may still exist somewhere but it has been replaced in

many salons with VOIP systems that use the internet to connect guests and salons. Cordless phones and headsets make the salon environment cord-free.

Products for sale are bar coded so sticking those little labels on that used to be part of my high school and college part-time job have vanished. Yay! They were never straight enough for my OCD sensibilities and they were a pain to remove and yet sticky once in the shower in use.

Stylists in some salons are beckoned to their next guest's arrival by a vibrating remote similar to the way we know it's our turn at a restaurant but the guest being served may not even know the next one has arrived.

And adding machines once mechanical became electric then became calculators and now the computer software does all the work of calculating the tax and even adding the gratuity.

And now we have StyleSeat, an App that allows a salon or individual stylist to set up a profile and then show schedules, prices, products, services, etc. In the case of a guest it allows a guest to locate local salons by zip code.

So the next time you visit the salon of your preference check out what's new in technology. I am constantly amazed and loving the changes. And the front desk job is now even more of a challenge. Technology did not replace a brain. People who do this important job have to be smarter and friendlier than ever. Here's to the Guest Service Provider, the new title I just learned this week.



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Prepping cards keeps December from snowballing

BY NICOLE ANZIA
Washington Post

I don't look forward to seeing holiday decorations adorning retailers' walls in October, and I don't start holiday shopping until after Thanksgiving, but I do like to start thinking about and planning to mass-mail holiday cards early. Now, before things become hectic, is the perfect time to do the early planning that will make your life easier in December.

■ Choose photos

If you plan to send a photo card, start sorting through your pictures now and put your favorites into a labeled electronic folder. This will save you the hassle of having to scroll through thousands of photos in one rushed sitting to find the ones you want to use. It's also a good idea to confirm that the resolution of your favorite photos is high enough that they will print clearly.

■ Gather and verify addresses

If you don't have a master list of addresses for your recipients, start creating one now. Scroll through the contacts on your phone, and e-mail or text friends and family to confirm you have their

current address. Make sure you're up-to-date on people's marital status. Take the time to create a master spreadsheet of your addresses. Once it's complete, it'll be easy to update and print labels. It will also give you an accurate count of how many cards you need to purchase.

■ Buy holiday stamps

Once you've created your master address list and know how many cards you plan to send, you'll be able to pick up stamps the next time you're at the post office. Seasonal stamps sell out quickly, so it's a good idea to check this off the list. Buy an extra book for the inevitable additions to your list and remember that if you plan to send square cards, they require extra postage.

■ Order cards early

If you're ordering holiday cards online, start scanning the sites now for designs you like and for upcoming sales. There are a lot of options to choose from and deciding on a style and format can take a while. If you've chosen your photos and found a design you like, go ahead and order early. Not only will this give you some cushion in the event of a printing or shipping error, it's also one less decision to make as the holidays approach and you need to concentrate on other things.

■ Print address labels

Printing address labels always turns out to be more difficult than it should be, at least for me. Make sure that you've purchased a sufficient number of labels to print both return-address and recipient-address labels (as well as some extras for the eventual misalignment), that you have sufficient ink in your printer, and that you have sufficient patience for the getting them formatted properly. Although time-consuming, this process will save you precious time later and result in fewer address errors.

■ Stuff, label, stamp and send

Last but not least, get your cards ready to mail. If you plan to write individualized notes on each card, avoid stress by not waiting until the last minute. Likewise, it takes a fair amount of time to stuff, seal, label and stamp 100 cards, so don't plan to do it all in one sitting. It will be more fun if you're not rushed.

Even as holiday cards have become less personalized in recent years, they are still a wonderful way to wish your friends and family a happy holiday season. But if you're crunched for time the week before the holidays, sending cards becomes a chore that's just what you don't need in the happy season. Start now.



Season's Greetings

Achoral celebration of "Season's Greetings" will be at St. Andrews Lutheran Church at 7 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 6. Tickets are \$12 in advance, available at Gallery 319 on Main Street and Good Company members, or \$15 at the door. As a special celebration, we will be singing three John Rutter pieces in honor of his 70th birthday.

Good Company, directed by Steven Hoifedt, is a select chorus of skilled singers who take time from their professional lives to learn and perform challenging music. Since its beginning in 1993, the group has been received with great enthusiasm in

central Iowa. Good Company's programs enable the audience to experience the wide and varied repertoire available for women's choirs. A concert may include opera selections and jazz, as well as contemporary and traditional music from many cultures.

Our members are talented, experienced vocalists who enjoy making music "in the company of friends." We are excited to share in the beauty of choral music while continuing to learn and grow as individual artists.

Good Company is supported in part by a grant from the Ames Commission on the Arts.

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Make choices now to eliminate holiday budgets in the new year

The intended topic for this column was spending plans/budgets. I wanted to write about the normal month to month expenses.

Then on one of those cold grey days last week I realized that in about a month I would be ready to buy and decorate a Christmas tree. So, even though it is 70 degrees as I write this, let's talk about Holiday spending.

How do you spend money for the holidays? Some people plan all year and adjust their expenses to accommodate the nearly inevitable holiday costs. I call this method 'Holiday Choices.'

Others buy now and deal with the expenses later. This is often accomplished with the use of credit cards. When the bills arrive they decide to have a budget next year for holiday expenses. I call this the 'I will do better next year' method.

What kind of a holiday shopper are you: a holiday choices or budget next year type?

Even the words choice and budget can create positive or negative feelings.

CHOICE is defined as the power or right to choose, the best or most preferred part. Choice could bring to mind: alternative, decision, favorite, judgment, opportunity, option, pick, preference.

BUDGET, when used as a noun could mean to allocate or have a spending plan.

As a verb, budget is defined as: to allocate, calculate, compute, estimate, predict, ration. Budget can mean a plan for money or time, during a given period. Think holidays.

My guess is that most of us would like to make purposeful decisions. When we are in the decision making role we know that we can choose how we allocate our time, energy and money. And the opportunity to make choices is at the top of the list of what makes people happy.

It is not too late to decide to make different choices. I know you can come up with more satisfying ways to spend your time, energy and money and create new holiday traditions. Here are choices I have been working on, hope they help you think of choices that fit your life.

I give the gift of time to children. Time in the park, reading a book, time to just be with and listen to that special niece, nephew, grandchild or any other child you care about. One on one time with a child is unusual and often quite enjoyable; my grandchildren never fail to surprise and entertain. And as a bonus, the child's parents may think the gift is for them.

You might talk with your children about what they received for Christmas last year.

If they are in third grade or younger, it is likely that they do not remember. If they do remember, last year's gift may be broken, forgotten, lost or need an upgrade to a new improved model.

This is a good time to ask your child of any age what they really would like this year. You can help them consider how long they will value and really use the gift. This could be the first step to understanding that setting priorities and

making choices are a part of life.

I know we want to give our children everything they want, some of us even get reminded of all the "stuff" their friends have. For what it is worth, I have been told by good authority that children are not permanently marred if they do not have everything they think they want or need. The authority was my mother 50 years ago, and mom always knows best.

Adult gifts used to be hard for me until I quit spending my time shopping and started spending time in the kitchen. I make oatmeal bread and caramel corn. My family and friends look forward to the treat and I love to give an appreciated gift. This is also a definite gift to myself, I listen to Christmas music, enjoy the lights on my tree and the wonderful aroma of baking fills my home.

The kitchen is a good place for me to make gifts, yours could be the camera, easel, sewing machine, potting shed, or any number of creative activities you enjoy.

If you are the 'let's budget next year' kind of gal, you probably will not become the 'holiday choices' poster child this year. Change takes time and small steps are how we make those changes.

This Holiday season make purposeful decisions as you spend your time, energy and money because... life is More Than Money.



KAREN
PETERSEN

Karen L Petersen CFP® CDFA™ is a fee based financial advisor. You can contact her at 515 232 2785 or karen@mymorethanmoney.net. Registered Representative, Securities offered through Cambridge Investment Research, Inc., a Broker/Dealer, Member FINRA/SIPC. Investment Advisor Representative, Cambridge Investment Research Advisors, Inc., a Registered Investment Advisor.

More services helping women travel solo

BY KORKY VANN
Tribune News Service

When it comes to travel, record numbers of women are hitting the road on their own.

That's the word from travel coach Nina Lesiga. The Stratford, Conn., resident, who retired after 30 years in the corporate world, decided to create a "dream job" for her second career. Building on her love of solo adventuring, she created a website and blog, (gotatravelsolo.com), created a group for solo travelers on MeetUp.com and began offering seminars for those interested in hitting the road on their own.

"Solo doesn't necessarily mean single," says Lesiga. "As the world changes, so do relationships. Yes, there are women who are widowed and divorced. But there are also women whose partners are unable or uninterested in traveling. These women have bucket lists of places they want to visit, so they look for ways to make that happen."

To that end, Lesiga helps solo travelers connect up with travel buddies and plan trips. She also provides practical advice on how to achieve solo status gradually.

"A lot of women are looking for travel buddies to share costs and for the social and safety aspects of having a companion," says Lesiga. "Others are more comfortable in a small group tour which provides built-in companions, but also allow for some time for exploring on their own. Still others are excited about setting out alone and just need a little guidance."

Overseas Adventure Travel (oattravel.com), a travel company offering small-group trips to

Americans 50 and older, saw such a demand for information from women that it created an 86-page booklet, "101 Tips for Women Travelers." (More than 40 percent of the company's customers go solo.) The information in the booklet was from those who knew the subject best — women travelers themselves.

The booklet includes a range of information for the novice and seasoned female traveler, including trip prep, packing, health and hygiene and safety. There's even a "Bandanarama" section which offers 25 uses for a scarf (sling, pillow cover, cold compress are just a few.)

Some tips for those who choose to go solo: Don't take more luggage than you can handle on your own, wear a wedding ring whether you're married or not (helps fend off unwanted attentions) and research locations before you set out.

Lesiga suggests checking out books for business travelers before setting out to a foreign country.

But although traveling alone can be a rewarding experience, it's not for everyone.

"You have to be able to deal with bumps in the road, because they will happen, no matter how prepared you are," says Lesiga. "Traveling is a skill just like anything else. The more you do it, the more self-confidence you'll have and the more comfortable you'll be."

The type of vacation you choose can help. Planning your trip around a hobby, for example, provides plenty of activities to keep you busy as well as built-in fellow travelers with like interest. Staying at a bed-and-breakfast

offers more opportunities for socializing than a chain hotel.

Connecting with local residents and other solo travelers offers opportunities for socializing while on the road. Global Greeters, globalgreeternetwork.info, is a network of Greeter programs around the world. (Greeters are local individuals who volunteer to meet visitors and show them around. There's no charge for the service, which is available in countries around the globe and cities throughout the United States.)

Apps can help as well. Backpackr connects backpackers traveling to the same destination and Skout helps travelers meet locals or other travelers.

Cost is another consideration for single trekkers, because many companies add on the dreaded "singles surcharge" to solo travelers' bottom line.

Strategies for avoiding supplemental fees include booking with companies like Overseas Adventure Travel, which does not charge single supplements, or luxury travel company Abercrombie and Kent, Grand Circle Cruise Line vacations and Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, which offer waived or reduced single supplement charges.

To order or download a free copy of "101 Tips for Women Travelers," visit oattravel.com/101-tips.



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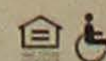


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SAVOR

Some Iowa family traditions start with favorite recipes



BY TODD BURRAS
Contributing Writer

Tis the season to be jolly ... and to shop and travel and entertain and bake and cook and the list goes on and on.

December is a hectic time for most families that observe various religious celebrations. It's a time for faith, family, friends and, let's not forget, food.

Traditions abound during the holidays — decorations are put out, religious services are attended, gifts are exchanged and a variety of food from cakes and candies to breads and meats and everything in between are prepared, served and shared among loved ones.

As the holidays approach, here are five favorite recipes offered up from a diverse group of Mid-Iowans. Enjoy!

Trinidadian black cake

By Barbara Lashley

Nestled among the British West Indies, the Caribbean island of Trinidad had been a British colony since the late 18th century (gaining independence in 1962). Within its traditional cuisine, the British presence is reflected, as in this recipe for the distinctive Christmas fruit-cake, a variation of the very English plum pudding. But here the Caribbean influence offers a strong regional adaptation with the incorporation of rich, dark tropical fruits, brown sugar, rum and molasses. Barbara remembers it as an integral specialty for the traditional Christmas Day Open-House hospitality tradition. It has been handed down through her mother's family, utilizing the ingredients and methods from generations past, preserving a truly Caribbean flavor.

INGREDIENTS

Fruit Base

1 pound pitted prunes
1/2 pound dark raisins
1/2 pound currants
1/2 pound pitted dates



1/2 cup mixed citrus peel
1/2 cup sliced almonds
2 cups dark rum
1 cup cherry brandy (plus extra for grinding fruit)

Batter

2 sticks butter
1/2 pound dark brown sugar
6 eggs
1 cup blackstrap molasses (or "browning")*
2 tablespoons pure vanilla extract
1 teaspoon almond extract
1/4 teaspoon Angostura bitters
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
4 teaspoons baking powder

PREPARATION

Begin at least two days in advance: combine the fruits with 1 cup each of rum and cherry brandy in a large glass container with a tight-fitting lid. Let sit at room temperature for at least two days and up to a year. Shake or stir the mixture occasionally.

When ready to continue with the assembly, combine the macerated fruit mixture with its liquid and the almonds in a blender or food processor and process in batches, using extra brandy to loosen. Grind to a coarse paste.

Preheat oven to 275° F. Prepare two 8-inch pans** using the usual butter-and-flour method, or line with parchment paper.

Cream the butter and sugar. Add eggs one at a time, beating between each addition. Add vanilla and almond extracts, and bitters. Mix and sift flour and baking powder. Gradually add sifted ingredients to creamed mixture.

Mix in fruit base and molasses. Divide batter among prepared pans, filling them leaving headspace at the top. Bake 1 hour.

Reduce temperature to 225° F. Bake 2 hours more, or until a tester comes out of the center clean.***

Cool the cakes in their pans on wire rack. While cooling, prick cakes with fork and drizzle with some of the remaining rum, about 3 tablespoons at a time. Repeat the morning and evening the next day. Continue according to preference.

NOTES

Cake has a shelf life of up to two years, the alcohol serving as preservative. It is traditionally served cut in 1 1/2 - to 2-inch squares.

* "Browning" is a burnt sugar preparation, liquefied with a bit of water; this traditional

method is simplified in the use of dark molasses with the same results.

** Disposable aluminum pans are satisfactory, and allow for convenient storage, given the long life of the cake.

*** Baking time will vary according to cake's thickness.

Colombian empanadas (empanadas colombianas)

By Diana Figueredo

An empanada is a thin bread dough, short crust pastry or puff pastry filled with a savory or sweet ingredients, with a baked or fried preparation. Its name comes from Castilian "empanar," which means "to put something in an enclose mass or pan to cook in the oven." The empanadas are known since colonial times and were incorporated



into its preparation ingredients used by the original inhabitants. In each region of the Colombian territory, the dough is made with flour milled wheat or maize or corn. The fillings vary between mashed potatoes with ground beef, or with peanuts, cheese, pumpkin, squash or sweet meat stews or chicken with rice and vegetables. They are small, crescent-shaped and fried in oil or baked. They have a relatively homogeneous character that allowed them to become synonymous with the Colombian cuisine, a real tradition in Colombia. In Diana's family they always make them with ground beef meat and potatoes and serve them with aji and lime wedges on the side.

INGREDIENTS

(yields 20, 3-inch empanadas)

2 cups of vegetable oil for frying
Lime and aji

Dough or "Masa"

1 1/2 cups precooked white cornmeal (masarepa)
2 cups water
2 tablespoon melted butter
1/4 teaspoon sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

Filling

2 cups peeled and diced red potatoes
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/2 cup chopped green onions
1 cup chopped tomato
2 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon chopped red bell pepper
1 chopped garlic clove
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 pound ground beef

PREPARATION

To prepare the dough: Place the white cornmeal in a large bowl. Add the sugar and salt and stir to mix. Add the water and butter and mix to form the dough. Pat the dough into a ball and knead for 3 minutes. Cover with plastic and set aside for 20 minutes.

To prepare the potatoes: Cook the potatoes in a pot with water a pinch of salt and pinch of garlic powder for 20 to 25 minutes. Drain and mash the potatoes. Set aside.

To prepare the meat: Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large, heavy skillet. Add the green onion and cook over medium-low heat stirring frequently, for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, garlic, bell pepper, cilantro, salt, black pepper, paprika and ground cumin. Cook for about 15 minutes. Add the ground beef. Cook, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon, for 15 to 20 minutes or until the mixture is fairly dry.

To prepare the filling: Transfer the meat mixture to the mashed potatoes bowl and mix well.

To make the empanadas: Break small portions of the dough, about 1 1/2 tablespoons each one, and form each portion into a ball by rolling between the palms of your hands. Place the balls of dough between two pieces of plastic and roll each out very thinly to form a circle, now remove the top plastic and place 1 tablespoon of the filling in the center of each. Then using the plastic underneath, fold the dough over to enclose the filling, forming a half circle. Tightly seal the edges by crimping with the tines of a fork.

To fry the empanadas: Fill a large pot with the vegetable oil and heat over medium heat to 360° F. Carefully place three or four empanadas at a time in the heated oil and fry for about 2 minutes until golden on all sides.

Using a slotted spoon transfer the empanadas to a plate lined with paper towels. Serve the empanadas with aji and lime wedges on the side.

Aji

(Aji is a spicy sauce, and my version is very mild. Aji is an absolute must for Colombian Empanadas.)

INGREDIENTS

1 seeded small hot pepper or 1 small red habanero pepper
1/2 cup white vinegar
1/4 cup water
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1 tablespoon lime juice
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley

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A simple sauce pulls a lot of extras together

Melange of refrigerator stir-fry Photo by Deb Lindsey/Washington Post

BY BONNIE S. BENWICK
Washington Post

A date, a time, a number of people, a menu: For a savvy caterer, the sum total should add up to precisely the food that's needed. But leftovers of a sort still factor into the equation, says Anna Saint John.

She has been a full-service caterer in the Washington area for 15 years, specializing in parties of 40 to 120 with heavy hors d'oeuvres or a buffet dinner. "What I'm good at is quantity cooking," Saint John says, "making something in a large volume that's tasty and pretty." In other words, she creates her own leftovers, each with a clear purpose.

When she makes vinaigrettes by the blenderful, or base sauces or stocks in quarts, she knows just how far they'll go. That's why the Food section challenged her to scale down three techniques that can help home cooks make the most of their cooked vegetables, meats, onion halves and half-empty condiment jars that might otherwise get tossed.

Waste is something Saint John cannot abide. "I go into people's homes, and I see what they are not doing," she says. "When people ask, 'What do you want for dinner?' the question ought to be, 'What should we eat for dinner?' The answer's most likely in their refrigerator."

Her take on a veloute - the classic, roux-thickened French sauce - becomes the basis of soul-satisfying potpies. She adds fresh or dried herbs and a touch of sherry, which lift it beyond a bland bechamel. Keeping a batch of it in the freezer simplifies the usual multi-step potpie process: making the sauce and pastry, chopping and sauteing the vegetables and protein of choice.

Saint John's production features a few tricks that apply to a casserole-size rendition as well as individual portions. She likes a two-crust potpie but makes it a literal top-and-bottom affair. No dough up the sides. ("Nobody misses it," she says.) She parbakes the bottom crust while she forms and freezes disks for the top crust: "You want the top really cold so it holds its shape when it goes

on top of a warm filling."

The defrosted veloute can be reconstituted with a little extra butter in a saucepan over medium-low heat, while leftover vegetables and poached or shredded rotisserie chicken (or chopped ingredients from a grocery store salad bar) are quickly sauteed in a separate pan.

Saint John's catering repertoire includes pan-Asian dishes, perhaps because Chinese cuisine was the first she set out to master. Now she makes her own "Srirachacha" - a blend of fresno, habanero and red and yellow cayenne peppers, with garlic, salt, rice wine vinegar and a touch of sugar - recently adding it to a meal at home of stir-fried leftover fried rice and duck breast.

"At some point, it hit me," she says. "I've learned that stir-frying needn't be limited to Asian ingredients."

The chef makes a quick pan sauce using broth, fresh tarragon, lemon zest and juice, seasoning it just so before chopped vegetables and/or meat goes in. A small corn-starch slurry thickens the sauce just enough



Dixie Day with six of her grand-kids and friends. Contributed photo

INGREDIENTS

Gingerbread Dough

This recipe will make two large houses and three to four small houses

- 1 cup margarine
- 1 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons ginger
- 1 cup light molasses
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 teaspoon cloves
- 5 cups flour

PREPARATION

Mix all ingredients together with an electric mixer.

Chill in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour or longer. It is much easier to work with when it is cold.

Roll out 1/4 inch thick on a greased cookie sheet. To prevent sheet from slipping while you roll put a damp cloth on the counter and under the cookie sheet.

Place the pattern pieces on the dough and cut the shapes using a pizza cutter and a small paring knife.

Bake at 300 degrees for 20 minutes or as long as it takes to become rigid.

Place on waxed paper on a flat surface.

If there is a lot of distortion of the pieces lay on the pattern pieces and trim while it is warm.

NOTES

Gingerbread pieces must be rigid. It is difficult to tell when it is done because it will leave an impression while it is warm. Let it cool. Then if it bends, return it to the oven until it is completely dried out.

The house may be assembled when the gingerbread is cool or you can store it in flat loosely covered containers until you are ready to build your house.

A wooden cutting board or a heavy piece of cardboard can be used for the base of your house.

I like to use Masonite cut to the size I want from the lumberyard. Cover the board with freezer wrapping paper, shiny side up.

Frosting for Gingerbread Houses

Recipe will do one large house

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound (3 3/4 cups) powdered sugar
- 3 egg whites — room temperature
- 3/4 teaspoon cream of tartar

PREPARATION

Beat at high speed for 5 minutes or until stiff peaks form. Keep covered with a damp cloth so frosting won't dry out. Add food

color if desired. Frosting can be kept in the fridge and used days later. Let it reach room temperature for best results.

Decorating Your House

The decorating possibilities are limitless. Here are some recommended supplies:

Decorating bags — one for each color to be used or one for each person decorating.

Couplers — one for each decorating bag. These will enable you to change decorating tips.

Decorating tips — beginners could start with two tips, one round tip for lettering and thin piping and one star tip for assembling the house and decorative touches.

Suggested tips that can be used: Round tips #1, 2, 3, 4; Star tips #16, 18, 21; Leaf tip # 67.

Suggested candies to decorate your house: Anything you want. But here are some standards: candy discs, tootsie roll logs, jelly beans or jelly bellies, candy canes, gum drops, licorice rope, peppermint sticks, M&M's, round peppermints, rock candy, sugar wafer cookies, sugar cubes, jellied fruit slices, candy corn, Life Savers, cinnamon sticks, coconut, ice cream cones, chocolate chips/fun chips, marshmallows, fancy cookies, colored sprinkles, sour patch "things," pretzels, Gummi "things," Skittles.

1/2 cup chopped green onions

1/2 cup chopped tomato

PREPARATION

Put the vinegar, water and habanero pepper in a blender for 2 minutes.

Place the remaining ingredients in a bowl and stir to mix. Add the vinegar and habanero mix to the bowl and mix well. Pour in a glass jar and cover. Buen provecho!

Lemon nut cake

By Linda Hodges

This is the official Hodges family fruit-cake. The family acquired the recipe in north Texas in the early years of the 20th century.

INGREDIENTS

1 pound
butter at room
temperature

2 cups sugar

6 eggs

1 teaspoon
baking soda dis-
solved in 1 table-
spoon boiling water

2 to 2 1/2 ounces lemon extract (This amount is not a mistake)

4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted before measuring

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 cup golden raisins

1 cup candied pineapple

1 10-ounce jar maraschino cherries,
drained, with liquid reserved

4 cups pecan halves or pieces

PREPARATION

Cream butter with electric mixer a few minutes until fluffy; blend in sugar until mixture is pale, for about five minutes. Beat in eggs, one at a time. Add baking soda mixture, then lemon extract. Sift flour with salt.

Drain the liquid from the maraschino cherries. Coarsely chop the cherries and pecans, setting aside a few unbroken ones to decorate the top of the cake.

Mix together fruits and nuts and lightly coat with a little bit of the flour. Add remaining flour, a small amount at a time, to the wet mixture. Stir in fruit and nuts.

Pour into a buttered tube pan lined with

parchment paper. Make design on top with reserved cherries and nuts, and bake in a preheated 300° F oven for 2 hours. You can also divide the batter and bake it in two large loaf pans, or three smaller pans. Test for done after 1 hour; cake is done when the top begins to brown and starts to crack a little bit.

Let cool for 15 to 20 minutes, then carefully remove cake from pans and finish cooling. Wrap in aluminum foil and store in airtight container in a cool place.

Hoppin' John

By Brian Myer

"For the past several years, on New Year's Day, I've been making Hoppin' John. This is unusual in our household because I don't fix many meals throughout the year; my talents in the kitchen lie more in washing dishes. But I do singlehandedly fix this simple dish for either New Year's lunch or dinner.

Hoppin' John is a traditional Southern holiday dish. Some believe eating black-eyed peas on the first day of the year is good luck. No one in our family is Southern, not even southern Iowa, but we do like the mixture of ham, beans and rice, especially on a cold day. And the thought of good luck entering the New Year is a bonus."

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil

1 large ham hock

1 1/2 cups of chopped onion

3/4 cup chopped celery

3/4 cup chopped green pepper

1 1/2 tablespoons chopped garlic

1 1/2 pounds black-eyed peas, soaked overnight and rinsed

1 1/2 quarts chicken stock

2 bay leaves

1 1/2 teaspoons dry thyme leaves

Salt, pepper, cayenne for seasoning

4 1/2 tablespoons finely chopped green onions

4 1/2 cups steamed white rice

PREPARATION

Heat oil in a cast-iron Dutch oven, add the ham hock and sear on all sides for 4 minutes.

Add the onion, celery, green pepper and garlic, cook for 4 minutes.

Add the black-eyed peas, stock, bay leaves, thyme and seasonings.

Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 40 minutes or until the peas are creamy and tender, stirring occasionally. If the liquid evaporates, add more water or chicken stock.

Remove ham hock, take the meat off the bone and return meat to the pot. Adjust seasonings as needed.

Garnish with green onions and serve over rice.

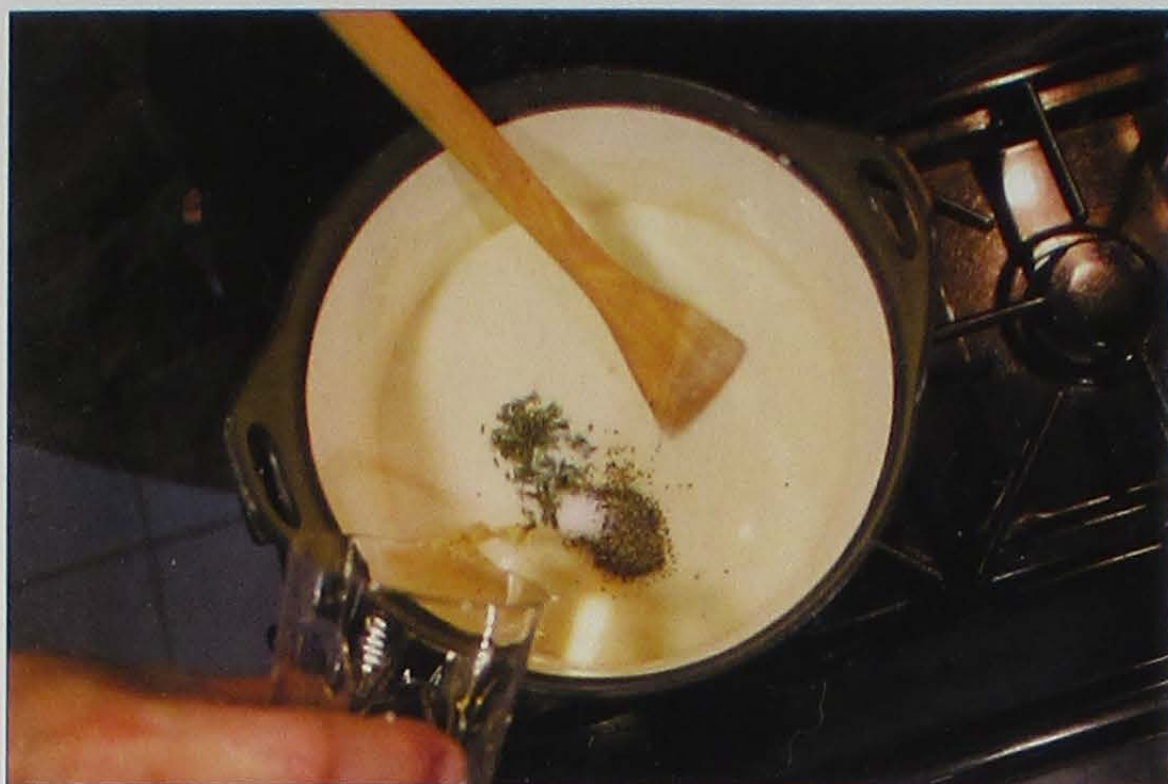
Gingerbread houses

By Dixie Day

"Connie Stegge and Darlys Orth were really the pros that got me started. I think Darlys still makes small ones and sells them every year. We got started making gingerbread houses in 1982 when

Jamie was 2 and Kelly was 5 years old and have done it every year since. There are now seven grandkids added to that number. I usually make up the gingerbread house pieces then we have a party soon after Thanksgiving with other friends and family, share all the candies and decorations and make a great big mess. After Christmas there is often another party to demolish the houses and eat what parts are still edible, after sitting out for a month. It was in recent years that we figured out that we could hide 'good' candy or surprises in the houses before the roofs go on, so there can be something 'good' to discover on demolition day. It has been a fun tradition for us and a delight to watch the next generation grow up with new, creative ideas for their masterpieces."





Washington area caterer Anna Saint John's version of veloute sauce comes together quickly, can be made in advance and is flavored with sherry and fresh herbs. *Photo by Deb Lindsey/Washington Post*

so it clings to the stir-fry components. The entree is light and bright-tasting, on its own or served over noodles. "And the flavors can swing Italian or Mexican, depending on your leftover ingredients," Saint John says.

The sauce inspiration comes from the 1973 "The Flavor-Principle Cookbook," by Elisabeth Rozin. Saint John remembers a demo she attended in the 1990s featuring the author and pots of plain chicken stock. "Adding garlic, ginger and sesame made it Chinese," she says. "Garlic, oregano and tomato made it Italian. Cumin gave it a Mexican feel. I was totally fascinated. Looking back, it seemed way ahead of its time."

Her enchiladas, the last of her technique trio, don't shortchange flavor. "They don't have to contain strictly Latin ingredients, either," she says. A modest-size can of fire-roasted tomatoes, pureed and doctored with a tablespoon of chipotle adobo, becomes the easy pantry sauce she spreads in the bottom of a baking dish and atop the filled

enchiladas - no need to even heat up the combined filling ingredients, which, on a day last week, were cooked black beans, collard greens, roasted red peppers, a bit of leftover red onion and a cup of shredded brisket. Saint John softens the stack of paper-towel-wrapped corn tortillas in the microwave so they're flexible and soak in some sauce.

A sprinkling of cheese and 20 minutes in the oven, and dinner for two is done even on a busy weeknight.

"Sometimes I think we're unfocused on how much we have," Saint John says. "You can find ways to use that half a bunch of celery. It doesn't take a lot of creativity."

Anna's Veloute Sauce

4 cups; enough for a 9-by-13 casserole or potpie

With this flexible base sauce on hand, a potpie or casserole of leftovers becomes a cinch to assemble. The consistency produced in this recipe is slightly thinner than some veloutes.

To make this nondairy, use a butter substitute such as Earth

Balance, omit the milk and double the amount of broth.

Feel free to customize with your own favorite fresh herbs.

Make ahead: The sauce can be frozen for up to 3 months. When you're ready to use it, let it defrost overnight in the refrigerator, then whisk it in a saucepan over medium-low heat with a little extra butter until it comes together again.

From Washington area caterer Anna Saint John.

INGREDIENTS

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter
1/2 cup flour
1 1/2 cups homemade or no-salt-added chicken broth
1 1/2 cups whole milk
1/4 cup dry sherry
2 stems fresh thyme (may substitute herb of your choice)
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Melt the butter in a deep saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in the flour to form a roux; cook for 5 to 8 minutes, whisking constantly, or until the mixture picks up a little color.

Gradually add the broth, milk, whisking constantly; cook for about 10 minutes, until smooth and thickened just enough to coat (nap) the back of a spoon. Stir in the sherry and drop in 1 stem of thyme. Season lightly with salt and pepper; remove from the heat and cool to room temperature.

Discard the thyme stem. Strip the leaves from the remaining stem of thyme and stir them into the veloute sauce.

Nutrition | Per 1/4 cup: 80 calories, 1 g protein, 4 g carbohydrates, 7 g fat, 4 g saturated fat, 20 mg cholesterol, 25 mg sodium, 0 g dietary fiber, 1 g sugar

Melange of Refrigerator Enchiladas

2 servings

Leftovers can make some mighty good fillings for enchiladas; you just need to know how to bring them together. You can embellish the meat or beans in this easy recipe by mixing them with a tablespoon or two of chipotle en adobo or gojuchang (Korean chili paste) before they are combined with other filling ingredients.

No special sauce is needed; here, just puree canned tomatoes.

Serve with your favorite salsa.

From Washington area caterer Anna Saint John.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup canned, fire-roasted (whole or diced) tomatoes and their juices, preferably no-salt-added
1 1/2 jarred roasted red peppers, chopped
1/2 cup cooked/grilled eggplant, chopped
1/2 cup cooked collards or other greens
1/2 cup chopped red onion (cooked or raw)
1/2 cup cooked shredded/chopped beef or cooked black beans (if using canned beans, drain and rinse them; may use 1/4 cup of each)
Four 6-inch corn tortillas
1/3 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese/sharp cheddar cheese blend

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Have a baking dish or ovenproof skillet at hand that's just large enough to hold 4 enchiladas.

Pour the tomatoes and their juices into a bowl; use an immersion (stick) blender to puree until smooth. Spread 1/4 cup over the bottom of the skillet or baking dish.

Combine the roasted red

peppers, eggplant, collards or other greens, red onion and the beef or black beans in a separate mixing bowl, tossing to incorporate.

Lay a tortilla across the surface of the sauce in the bowl, turning it to briefly coat both sides. Transfer to a clean work surface or plate. Spoon one-quarter of the mixture down the center of the tortilla and roll to enclose, so the seam is on the underside, placing it in the baking dish.

Repeat with the remaining tortillas and filling.

Spoon the remaining tomato puree evenly over the tortillas, then top with the cheese. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the cheese is bubbling and the filling has warmed through.

Nutrition | Per serving (using black beans): 290 calories, 13 g protein, 47 g carbohydrates, 7 g fat, 4 g saturated fat, 20 mg cholesterol, 420 mg sodium, 9 g dietary fiber, 9 g sugar

Melange of Refrigerator Stir-Fry

4 servings

Here, a quick stir-fry sauce - no Asian ingredients required - brings leftover meat and/or vegetables together in an almost elegant way. When she doesn't have homemade broth on hand, Silver Spring caterer Anna Saint John likes to use the No Chicken Base (vegetarian) made by Better Than Bouillon.

No leftovers to start with? The meats and vegetables are all available on most supermarket salad bars.

Serve on its own, or over rice, noodles or cooked quinoa.

From Washington area caterer Anna Saint John.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups vegetable broth (may substitute chicken broth; see headnote)

Finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon

Leaves from 6 stems fresh tarragon, chopped, or more as needed

1 fresh bay leaf

1 teaspoon honey, or more as needed

1 generous teaspoon Dijon-style mustard, or more as needed
Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup diced onion (optional)

1/4 cup diced celery (optional)

Meat from 2 cooked boneless, skinless chicken breasts, chopped (may substitute cooked turkey breast or cooked, boneless pork tenderloin; about 3 1/2 cups total)

2 roasted red peppers, chopped

1 1/2 to 2 cups cooked green beans, cut into 2-inch lengths (may substitute frozen peas or cooked broccoli florets)

1 tablespoon cornstarch

2 tablespoons water

Combine the broth, lemon zest and juice, tarragon, bay leaf, honey and mustard in a wide saute pan over medium-high heat. Cook, stirring, until the mixture is just below a boil. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Taste; you're looking for a good balance of flavors, so adjust the seasoning, herbs, honey and/or mustard as needed.

Add the diced onion and celery, if using, the chicken, roasted red peppers and green beans, tossing to coat evenly.

Whisk together the cornstarch and water in small a cup to form a smooth slurry, then whisk it into the saute pan mixture. Cook for a few minutes; the mixture needs to come to a boil so it can thicken. Taste and add salt and/or pepper as needed. Discard the bay leaf before serving.

Nutrition | Per serving (using chicken): 250 calories, 39 g protein, 13 g carbohydrates, 5 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 105 mg cholesterol, 510 mg sodium, 2 g dietary fiber, 4 g sugar

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Healthy snacks for the holidays and new year

A New Year will be upon us soon. Many people start to think about their health during the holidays, before the start of the New Year. One healthy lifestyle guideline to consider this New Year is incorporating snacks throughout the day. Why? Healthy snacking is actually good for you. Snacking is a great pick-me-up, providing consistent energy and focus throughout the day. It provides an opportunity to include all the important food groups in your diet to help ensure adequate vitamin and mineral intake. Snacking also can keep you from overeating at your next meal. And if you're an athlete, healthy snacks can help meet the increased calorie and nutrient needs of maintaining/gaining lean body mass.

What is the key to healthy snacking? The key is finding snacks that provide quality nutrients, while keeping them under 200 calories each for an average adult, or between 200 and 300 calories for athletes, and limiting snacks to one or two a day. Think of snacks as mini-meals that contribute nutrient-rich foods.

Nutrition-Packed Snacks

A healthy snack includes at least one food from the MyPlate™ food groups — grains, vegetables, protein, fruit and dairy. Combine peanut butter and banana and you offer your body manganese, folate, protein, niacin, vitamin C, fiber and potassium. Those nutrients are important for healthy eyes and strong muscles, an increased feeling of fullness and heart health.

Combine Greek yogurt and blueberries to get vitamin A, calcium, protein, vitamin C, manganese and fiber. These nutrients are important for healthy eyes, hair, nails, skin, strong bones and heart health, and are rich in disease-fighting antioxidants.

Combine hummus and baby carrots for the nutrients of manganese, folate, fiber, protein, copper, phosphorus, iron, vitamins A, K and C, potassium and magnesium.

These nutrients support healthy digestion and an increased feeling of fullness and are important for healthy vision.



AMY CLARK

Pistachios and an apple offer your body the nutrients of phosphorus, potassium, vitamin B6, fiber, protein and vitamin C. These nutrients give an increased feeling of fullness, have cancer-fighting properties and are heart-healthy.

A snack of low-fat cottage cheese with red peppers gives your body vitamins A, C, K and B6, as well as protein, calcium and fiber. Those nutrients are important for strong muscles and bone health and important for healthy vision.

Healthy Snack Options

Here are some healthy snack options, which include a protein, fat and/or fiber food with a carbohydrate food:

- 1/4 cup nuts, such as pistachios, and a piece of fruit
- 2 sheets of graham crackers with natural peanut butter or almond butter
- 4 to 5 whole-grain crackers with peanut butter
- 1 slice whole-grain bread with peanut butter
- Carrots, cherry tomatoes, cucumber or celery sticks with an oil-based salad dressing or vinaigrette
- Popcorn trail mix: 1 cup light popcorn mixed with 1/4 cup nuts and 2 tablespoons raisins
- Cereal mix: 1/4 cup nuts, 2 tablespoons dried fruit, 1 tablespoon chocolate pieces and 1/4 cup whole-grain cereal
- Low-fat yogurt with 2 to 3 tablespoons chopped nuts
- Hummus with cut vegetables or whole-wheat pita bread
- Sliced apple or banana with peanut butter
- Peanut butter smoothie: Blend 1 cup non-fat vanilla Greek yogurt, one banana and 1 tablespoon peanut butter

■ Fruit smoothie: Blend 6 ounces low-fat vanilla yogurt, 1/2 cup skim milk, 1 cup fresh or frozen berries (strawberries, raspberries or blueberries)

■ Fresh fruit or vegetables with 1/2 cup low-fat cottage cheese

■ 13 baked corn chips with fresh salsa

■ A hard-boiled egg with a piece of whole-grain toast topped with light, non-trans-fat margarine

■ Spread celery sticks with peanut butter or low-fat cream cheese. Top with raisins or dried cranberries.

■ Toast a Thomas light English muffin, drizzle with pizza sauce and sprinkle with low-fat mozzarella cheese.

■ Top a banana with low-fat vanilla and strawberry frozen yogurt. Sprinkle with your favorite whole-grain cereal or granola.

■ Put cubes of low-fat cheese and grapes on pretzel sticks.

■ Spread vanilla Greek yogurt over a graham cracker and top with cut fruit.

■ In a bowl, combine All-Bran wheat crackers, Cheerios, animal crackers, honey bear-shaped crackers, shredded wheat cereal, raisins and M&M's.

■ Try an Old Wisconsin turkey stick with a clementine.

■ Combine a mozzarella cheese stick with grapes.

■ Indulge with a Yoplait whipped Greek 100 calorie yogurt and 3/4 cup of your favorite berries.

For more healthy snack ideas, visit with your Ames Hy-Vee Dietitians, Amy or Nicole.

**The information is not intended as medical advice. Please consult a medical professional for individual advice.

Amy Clark received her Bachelor of Science Degree in nutrition and dietetics from Iowa State University in 2003 and completed her dietetic internship at Iowa Methodist Medical Center in 2004. She is a member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and Iowa Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Amy completed CDR Certificate of Training in Adult Weight Management in November 2006. This information is not intended to be medical advice.



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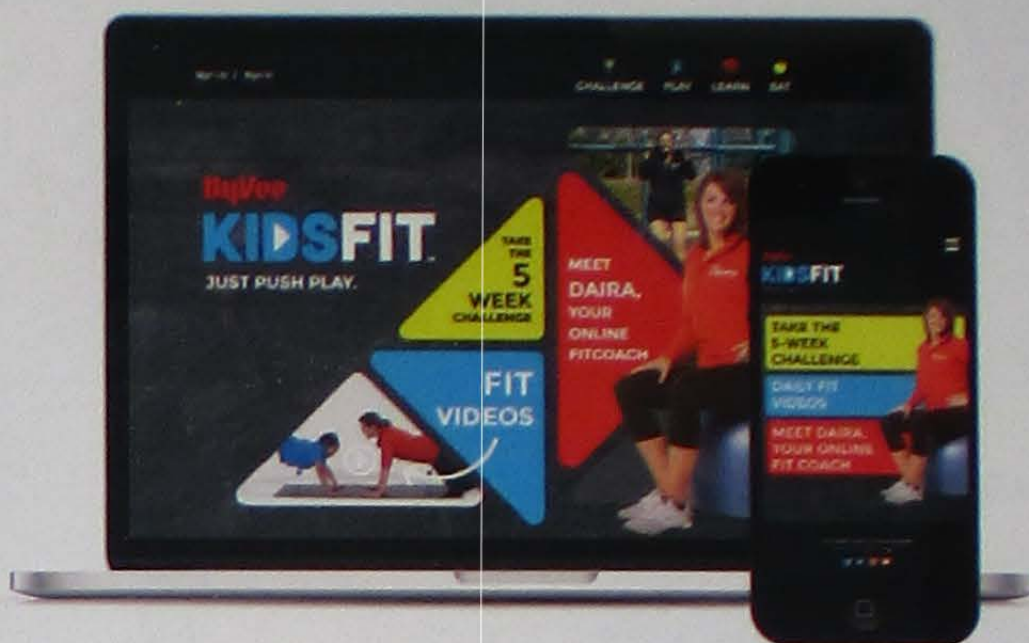


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